

## **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD WHO RESTORES MY SOUL!**

Psalm 23: 1-6 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

There are certain psalms that stand out above all others. Psalm 23 was written by a shepherd as well as a king. Who would have ever predicted that the youngest son of Jesse who began his life working as a shepherd boy would become the greatest earthly king of Israel, the most unusual king, the king whom we have always identified with since childhood? David, the shepherd-king has had our attention since we were toddlers, and he is always home for us, waiting quietly to teach us about the Lord, waiting with the light on in Psalm 23. What glorious words are these. They come to us with a theme, a cadence, and a glory that makes us feel better, and almost always, if we listen to the words, Psalm 23 restores our souls. I especially love Psalm 23, not only because I am a pastor, a shepherd, but because of the shepherding vocation of my soul. The vocation of our soul is the bottom line of who we are, when we seem to be nothing else. David was a brave soldier, a triumphant king, a mighty warrior, a sacred song writer, and a father who often failed in his task. Yet, at the bedrock of who David was, he was in his heart and in his inner soul, a shepherd. The ministry of the inner man in David to our souls is the ministry of the Lord as his shepherd. This shepherding vocation of David's soul began originally out in the fields where David encountered the Lord and had intimate communion with Him.

Often when God has wanted to reveal Himself to His own people, He has chosen to reveal Himself as a shepherd, the good shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep and the chief shepherd. Here David tells us the Lord is my shepherd, our personal shepherd. Not only is shepherding a vocation we can all relate to; it is one of the least of all favored vocations, not a highly esteemed employment. God wants to meet us here in His role of shepherding our lives by the intention of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to know Him as our own personal shepherd, as our own tender, compassionate Protector in every way, Who is ever present to care for His flock. What a blessing to know the Lord as our own shepherd! How humbling of Jesus to want to reveal Himself to us as our shepherd...and to use shepherding as His relationship to us as our Lord. There is a lowly loveliness and sweetness and tenderness here in the Lord, our Shepherd, inspiring this psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd." Beloved, Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 3: 1 that to seek to be an overseer or a pastor, is to aspire to a noble task or occupation. Noble as it is, it is also a lowly occupation. To shepherd is to use all our gifts to feed the flock, to rescue lambs and bring them into the one true flock and fold. Shepherding can be very hard. It is often quite a dirty job. It is not glamorous. But as we see from Psalm 23, it has its rich benefits. He goes on to say in John 10: 12 that there are

other “wanna be” shepherds who are hirelings, who go about outwardly looking like they are shepherds. Yet, in fact, these hirelings care nothing for the sheep. In truth, these are false shepherds who get fat off of their sheep. The shepherd, however, loves His sheep so much that he gives his life for them. Psalm 23 is a shepherd’s prayer to the Good Shepherd that brings blessings to all of God’s shepherds and all of God’s sheep. David wrote, in these six verses, touching words that poetically describe the life of a lamb in the care of the Shepherd. I call us today to enter into a time today asking God to renew our relationship with Him as our Shepherd and to restore our souls. Let’s listen to these familiar words as we hear David, the shepherd describe God’s ministry to us as our Shepherd. Only a shepherd under the guidance of the great Shepherd of the sheep could describe so graphically the Lord as our Shepherd.

In the last message I preached to you all on Psalm 23, I spoke of how all the basic needs and wants of our lives are provided for us in Jesus. In that message, I broke down the six verses into twelve needs God provides. (1) I shall not want. Why? He makes me lie down in green pastures. (2) I shall not want for refreshment. Why? He leads me beside the still waters. (3) I shall not want for restoration. Why? He restores my soul. (4) I shall not want for guidance. Why? He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. (5) I shall not want for courage. Why? Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. (6) I shall not want for comfort. Why? Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (7) I shall not want for supply. Why? You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. (8) I shall not want for protection. Why? The table you spread before me is in the presence of my enemies. (9) I shall not want for power. Why? You anoint my head with oil. (10) I shall not want for joy. Why? My cup runs over. (11) I shall not want for goodness and mercy. Why? Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. (12) I shall not want forever. Why? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Today, I want us to look at Psalm 23 in a more cohesive way, in a more integrative way, as the psalm of the blessing of having the Lord as our Shepherd. There are 12 blessings but I want to organize them into three major blessings we have when we are safe in the care of the Shepherd of our souls. What are these three major blessings of having Jesus as our shepherd?

**THE BLESSING OF OUR SHEPHERD’S PRESENCE.** (I.) Notice in verse 1, “The Lord is my shepherd.” This relationship David had with his Shepherd, and that the Shepherd had with him was intensely individual. Can you say those same words and know in your soul it is true?—“The Lord is my Shepherd.” We can quote this beautiful psalm flawlessly and yet not know the application of this experience in our daily life. Some know or say they know “The Lord is my Savior,” but they know little of His Shepherding. So the first recognition of the blessing of our Shepherd’s presence is **(1) Our identity with the Lord as our Shepherd.** Beloved, if the Lord is our Shepherd, why are we still trying to carry the weight of the world upon our shoulders. We sing it, but do we mean it? “If He carried the weight of the world upon His shoulders, brother, I know that He will

carry you.” What an assurance! So often I have been many miles up high in the Wind River Mountains, and I have come upon huge flocks of sheep. But sometimes, I find that one sheep has gone astray and has not stayed with the flock following the Shepherd. I found one sheep sinking in quick sand. I found another sheep that got too close to the rushing river and it was panicked, frozen and unable to move. I watched a shepherd lasso the sheep in sinking quicksand, pull it out, rub down its legs and soon the sheep was following the shepherd back to the flock. When I saw the sheep, I was on the other side of the river where I couldn’t do anything to help. An isolated sheep soon is alone in the wilderness, vulnerable to wolves, coyotes, cougars, bears, and all because that sheep never stayed with the shepherd, identified with him. We have the Shepherd of all shepherds leading us if we know Jesus. We are saved and kept by the sovereign grace of Jesus. May we stay close to his side, identified with Him and in Him.

Another blessing of our Shepherd’s presence is security. **(2) Our security with the Lord as our Shepherd.** I read in verse 4b—“I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” What a security to know that God’s rod is there not only to keep us in line but to go after the enemy. We sing, “More secure is no one ever than the loved ones of the Savior.” God has appointed two secure means of keeping us closely identified with Him. First, the rod is given us to comfort us. One verse has often intrigued me in Micah 6: 9 is, “Hear or heed the rod and Him who appointed it.” That word for heed or hear the rod is shama. It means to hear intelligently with attention and obedience. It means to give undivided attention. In America, in our homes and in our culture, we shun and hate the rod of God or of our parents. A son or daughter who is in your home without loving discipline by the rod is an insecure, un comforted child you are neglecting. Hebrews 12: 6 tells us God chastens every son and daughter He receives. He says our discipline in Hebrews 12: 8 is proof of our identity. The Word of God says that “If we are without discipline, we are bastards, illegitimate children and not sons.” To be without God’s secure discipline is to be without His brand, His seal on our soul. Our security is in our loving discipline with the rod. Then there is the staff. The staff is used to nudge the neck of the sheep, keeping them ever aware of the presence of the faithful Shepherd. The staff can be used on occasions to lean out over a cliff where a sheep is trapped to hook a sheep under his neck to pull him to safety. We live in an age of insecurity. Go to the airport and the perpetual routine is all about every means of trying to prevent a repeat of 9/11/01. Will we have a repeat of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon and the field in Pennsylvania? Secure sheep in insecure times have come to kiss God’s rod and staff. Why? They are God’s way to identify us and make us secure, comforted, as belonging to the Lord.

**What I am about to tell you about the rod and staff is true,** and most of us don't know it. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The word for comfort is nacham. This Hebrew word means to become sorry for sin, to sigh and breathe strongly as you turn from a wrong action to a positive course of action. 41 times the word is translated repent. The comfort God wants to bring to families and homes and to marriages and to America is repentance. Josh Groban wrote a song that could well be used of God to help us welcome the security of the rod and staff. He wrote a song called "The Prayer." The first verse I love. "I pray you'll be our eyes, and watch us where we go. And help us to be wise in times when we don't know. Let this be our prayer, when we lose our way. Lead us to the place, guide us with Your grace. To a place where we'll be safe." This is the cry and prayer of a true sheep who belongs to the Lord. "Shepherd of Love, do it again for me, and do it for Your flock in our church. Speak to the deepest parts of our souls, quiet the storms, take our hand and lead us past the pain of our past and the perplexities of the present into the security of faith for the future, identified with you. We bless you for the blessing of Your presence, Jesus our shepherd. Secondly,

**THE BLESSING OF OUR SHEPHERD'S PROTECTION.** (II.) Sheep live under the shadow of continual assault. But God has a covering for those whom He shepherds. There are three coverings. **The first protective covering is the blessing of strong courage.** (1) David tells us in verse 4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. David knew that leading sheep from the lowlands to the high meadows in the summer necessitated going through valleys, dark valleys. To make it to the place, verse 5 where God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, sheep have to pass through valleys. All mountains have valleys, ravines, gulches, draws, and ditches. And the best way to the top to the high meadows filled with grass is along and through the valleys. But where do predators lie in wait? Mountain lions look down from their perch up high, waiting for the moment to leap from their granite ledge on a defenseless sheep. Along the valleys are the remains of the sheep that didn't make it. The valleys are the valleys of the shadow of death. Beloved, these valleys all of us have to go through, including the final valley of the shadow of death—which we all dread, but which the Shepherd will take us safely through from earth to heaven, from sorrow to joy, from pain to gladness, and from darkness to His light and loving arms. What makes us not be afraid? What gives us courage? "You are with me."

**The second protective covering is the blessing of refuge.** (2) Notice verse 5. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Go up to Donald Lake, high above Dad's Lake. Shepherds bring their sheep up past Fish Lake and

over the ridge they come running down into the meadow below Donald Lake. Here the sheep dogs can guard the perimeter and the grass is lush, The valley fears are over. The predators can crouch and hope for a sheep to go astray, but the table land of grass is safe as the wolves and lions look on. The strange truth is that the table land is a safe refuge. We sing, “Lord, lift me up and help me stand, By faith on Heaven’s table land. A higher plane than I have found. Lord plant my feet on higher ground.” David as he penned Psalm 23 had to have remembered how often he prepared a table for his sheep in the presence of the enemies of his flock. Now David is rejoicing in the Lord that He is the good shepherd who helps us as His sheep to eat and drink and rejoice even though there are predator eyes watching. Right there in the presence of our enemies is our refuge. There we find our nourishment. There we eat and drink and sleep to our hearts’ content. This past Monday evening I went home to find an intruder had broken out our master bedroom window patio door. It is shattered in a million pieces. The police investigated it and only know that something made the intruder leave. That room is where my wife and I sleep. We’ve always felt safe before. The police said he would set a special two week watch on the back of our house. That’s kind, but my Shepherd has a 24 hour watch and what looks ominous—looking out the shattered glass I have to fix is now a reminder that God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

**The third protective covering is the blessing of God’s anointed healing. (3)**

Notice verse 5b—Don’t you love this blessed part of Psalm 23? How beautiful. “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Anointing sheep kills off the bugs, the parasites, and even heals diseased legs. It’s not just sheep that need the anointed healing of the Master’s touch. When God heals us, then we need the cup of His living water to fill our cup to the brim and running over. Jesus Himself, our Shepherd was wounded for our transgressions—He is the Lamb of God who is also our shepherd. He was wounded for you and me. The cup that Jesus drank from was the cup of suffering—dying to atone for our sins. Out of His suffering and bleeding and dying, came life for those who repent, believe and receive Him. Each of us who are wounded on the journey of life, need to drink from that cup until we overflow. In fact, only those who drink from this overflowing cup know the joy of salvation. Do you need this touch from God today, His anointing and healing touch and His overflowing cup? I do, in times of loss and trouble and trial and sickness and sorrow. I can’t make it alone without God’s anointing and outpoured cup. I need the filling of the Holy Spirit of God. I did afresh this week. God poured out His Spirit afresh on me. What a protection, healing and anointing! Thirdly,

**THE BLESSING OF OUR SHEPHERD’S PATHWAY, PASTURE, AND PILGRIMAGE.** (III.)

Our Shepherd Himself is the way, the path. John 14: 6 is so clear. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father, but by Me.” The blessing of our shepherd’s pathway is that though He makes us lie down in green pastures, v. 2 and leads us beside still waters, we are on a journey. **Our shepherd is our Guide.** (1) **We** have a destination. We are going somewhere. Verse 6 tells us where. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life.” Like two mammoth white Pyrenees sheep dogs, God’s mercy is my rearguard as my Shepherd, v. 3 “leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. God is going before me and guarding me from behind. Our Shepherd is taking us from a place of drought and famines and wars and tsunamis and earthquakes and fires and floods and a moon as red as blood to His place He has prepared in glory—Talk about a table spread before us—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is the destination of our Shepherd. He is the way and He knows the way through the wilderness. Our shepherd knows when He has to make us lie down and rest in Him before we can run again in ministry. He knows we get weary on the way. He knows our fear of rushing streams, so He leads us beside still waters, v. 2. Our shepherd wants us to come apart at times and rest a while, as we lie down in green pastures, not to eat, but just to rest. He calls us to steal away to Him in the early morning hours, before the sun comes over the mountain. In the still of the cool mornings, He calls us to be still and know that He is God and He is guiding.

**Our Shepherd is our Restorer on the path.** (2) Verse 3 begins with “He restores my soul.” God can do it for us in our morning devotions, in our times of meditation, as we listen to a message, as we go for special counsel, as we come with longing to the Lord’s Table, Grace that restores is God’s gift. He can restore us through repentance, through loving discipline, with His rod and staff, and He can restore us when His anointing flows and fills our cup. Being restored is crucial for the next leg of the journey. **Lastly, Our Shepherd is our Hessed—Our lovingkindness and tender mercy** (3) every waking and sleeping moment of all our days. This glorious covenant love of Jesus flows from God’s triune presence all the days of our lives. Without my renewal by His mercy, without His rod and staff, I would stray and lose my way and revert back to the default sinful settings of my sinful past. And since the pathways and pastures are part of a pilgrimage, I’m on my way to where, v. 6—“And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Where we are headed is home—to the House of the Lord. Our destination is not just the temple of God. We were meant for Home. Like a migrating goose, we are going Home. So kiss the path you lie down in; kiss the still waters and anointing oil whereby He restores our soul. Kiss the paths of righteousness and kiss the Son, the good Shepherd whose rod and staff comfort you and bring you Home.